

## WHAT IS AN INITIATIVE?

Often referred to as “direct democracy,” the initiative process is the power of the people to place measures on the ballot. These measures can either create or change statutes (including general obligation bonds) and amend the California Constitution. If the initiative proposes to amend California statute, signatures of registered voters gathered must equal in number to 5% of the votes cast for all candidates for Governor in the most recent gubernatorial election. If the initiative proposes to amend the California Constitution, signatures of registered voters gathered must equal in number to 8% of the votes cast for all candidates for Governor in the most recent gubernatorial election. An initiative requires a simple majority of the public’s vote to be enacted.

## WHAT IS A REFERENDUM?

Referendum is the power of the people to approve or reject statutes adopted by the State Legislature. However, referenda cannot be used to approve or reject urgency measures or statutes that call for elections or provide for tax levies or appropriations for current expenses of the state. Voters wishing to block implementation of a legislatively adopted statute must gather signatures of registered voters equal in number to 5% of the votes cast for all candidates for Governor in the most recent gubernatorial election within 90 days of enactment of the bill. Once on the ballot, the law is defeated if voters cast more “no” votes than “yes” votes on the referendum question.

The laws governing referendum qualification differ significantly from those for initiative qualification in the following ways:

- The timeline for collecting referendum signatures is shorter. Referendum proponents have 90 days from when a statute is enacted to get a title and summary from the state Attorney General, be cleared for circulation by the Secretary of State, and to submit petition signatures. Initiative proponents have 150 days for circulation after their petitions receive title and summary and are cleared for circulation.
- A referendum can qualify for the ballot closer to a statewide election than an initiative can. Referenda can qualify for the ballot 31 days before a statewide election, whereas initiatives must qualify 131 days before a statewide election.

Referenda are far more rare than initiatives. Since 1912, 43 referenda have been placed before voters, compared to 327 initiatives.